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(Understanding Impact of SAD-BJP combine on Punjab Politics) - International journal of
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**More than Two Decades of Political Matrimony
Divorce or Separation Ahead**
(Understanding Impact of SAD-BJP Combine on Punjab Politics)

Nectu Sharma
Assistant Professor
Mata Sundri College for Women
University of Delhi

Abstract : This paper tries to understand the implications of Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) breaking political ties with the BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party) on the issue of three farm bills being passed in Parliament recently. Akali Dal, The oldest regional party of India completes a century this year, formed in 1920, its voter base which comprises of Sikhs in general and Jat Sikhs, in particular, has been constantly shrinking in its home turf especially the Malwa belt after they adopted the "accommodationist model" since 1997. They joined hands with The Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) the political party which represented the interests of Hindus the second-highest religion in Punjab after Sikhs. The strategy paved the way for electoral gains for both parties. The shift was clear and loud. Under the compulsions of electoral politics, they projected themselves as a party that stood for Punjab, Panjabis, and Panjabiyat. It was not an easy switch for a Panthic party which since its inception had been known to secure the interests of its community i.e. the Sikhs. It is in this background this paper tries to understand the future of this alliance post these developments. This new shift towards 'back to basics' will be the good electoral strategy for Akali Dal which has despite its claims not been able to be inclusionist in its politics and has stuck to its sectoral tendencies for the last 23 years. Thus, an attempt has been made to understand the future of this move on Punjab Politics.

Keywords: Coalition politics, SAD, BJP, religion, democracy, political processes, identity politics, Punjabi Suba, AAP

Herbert. H. Hyman had once made an observation "Sometimes, it is the Odd fate of a concept that it can have too successful a career. After it wins scientific acceptance it may become so appealing and fashionable that it is applied indiscriminately¹.....

Introduction

Akali Dal is popularly known as SAD (Shiromani Akali Dal) and more specifically as SAD (Badal) for voters in Punjab. This political party has been the prime mover of Punjab Politics since its inception in 1920. As it completes 100 years of its formation this year the stage is set to woo back its primary voter base the Panthic voters in Punjab. The larger question in this backdrop is that with an excessively shrinking base in its home state and within the community will it be possible for the oldest regional party to win back the Sikh votes after they have left their coalition partners of last 23 years the BJP and taken a firm stand on the three farmers bills passed by the BJP government at the centre. The SAD had initially thought it could get away by just withdrawing Harsimrat Kaur Badal from the Union Cabinet. However, the farmers who form the major voter base of the party were not convinced with the piecemeal approach.

Mixed opinions started pouring in after SAD took this decision to call it quits. Severe criticism came from the arch-rivals the Congress in Punjab and the new entrant AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) in the former bi-polar and now tripolar contest. The decision was taken too late and under immense pressure from the farmers or Jat peasantry which form their core voter base. Some observers of Punjab politics said this was the final nail in the coffin and they saw it coming for a long time. The farmer's bill gave them a respectable and solid reason for the exit. The duo fared badly in last two Parliamentary elections in Punjab and in recent assembly elections of 2017 where Akali had a humiliating defeat managing to get only 15 seats out of 117.

This decision to part ways has been pent up of emotions over the years. Whatever the reasons may be one needs to understand the larger picture in this drama which has recently unfolded and what lies ahead for Akali Dal needs to explore in this light. This Paper intends to contextualise the Politics of Punjab in the last few decades and also understand the future ahead for both political partners who have been unable to survive on their own till now in Punjab Politics primarily due to the identity politics they heavily rely upon. Whether this would bring a fundamental or temporary shift in Punjab Politics needs to be examined.

The Word Coalition means 'coalescence' to grow together². The Oxford English dictionary describes coalition as; an alliance for combined action of distinct Party, persons, or status without permanent incorporation into one body.³ However, coalition politics is not a new phenomenon for India, for politics and government of the democratic variety-especially in a country of India's size and diversity have to be necessarily a coalitional exercise, whether at the electoral or governmental level. A study of the concept of the coalition at the theoretical level leads one to explore the various variety of theories framed around coalition politics. It most commonly devotes 'A Co-

¹ Herbert H. Hyman political Socialization, New York. The Free press, a division of the Macmillan company 1957 P.7

² . Encyclopedia of social science, Vol III, New York, the Macmillan company, 1963 p. 600

³ The Oxford English dictionary, vol. II C, Oxford, the Clarendon press, 1933 P. 552.

